

Feb. 14, 2009:

Construction resumes on men's homeless shelter

Story Body:By Shaun Hall

of the Daily Courier

Construction of a shelter to house homeless men has resumed, after a nearly two-year delay due to lack of funding.

A recent grant awarded to the Gospel Rescue Mission means that the sound of hammering is echoing again near G and Foundry streets.

Earlier this week, carpenters nailed plywood to framing that will become the first-floor walls of a planned multistory, 78-bed building called Wagner Hall.

A construction completion date is uncertain, and is dependent on continued donations. The awarding of a \$930,000 grant that spurred on the work was announced in December. It came from the Federal Home Loan Bank's Affordable Housing Program.

"We are thankful it is under way," said Keith Heck, the mission's executive director.

The new facility, being built next to a women's and children's center, will give residents "a sense of dignity," Heck believes.

The mission's current men's facility, at 244 N.E. E St., has only 11 bunk beds and some mattresses on the floor to help provide a place for 47 men to sleep. It's not much.

"It's better than out under the bridge, but, man, it's tough," Heck said.

About \$850,000 remains to be raised for the \$3.2 million Wagner Hall. The new facility is 72 percent funded.

Heck said \$80,000 is needed soon, however, before the grant money can be tapped into. In the meantime, reserves are funding the current work.

Heck trusts that donations will come in — "I check the mail every day with great expectation" — and that construction company Ausland Builders has been patient. Ausland also built the mission's nearby Fikso Family Center for women and children.

"They're a godsend," Heck said. "They're willing to put up with our struggles."

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